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Exploration and Discovery

PALESTINIAN LAMPS WITH CHRISTIAN INSCRIPTIONS

Since the year 1864, when the Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem began with a view to restoring the water system of the city, lamps with Christian inscriptions have been coming to the light after long burial in tombs. Such are figured in almost every volume recording the operations of the Palestine Exploration Fund and the archaeological researches of M. Clermont-Ganneau and others. At first the inscriptions were figured, but

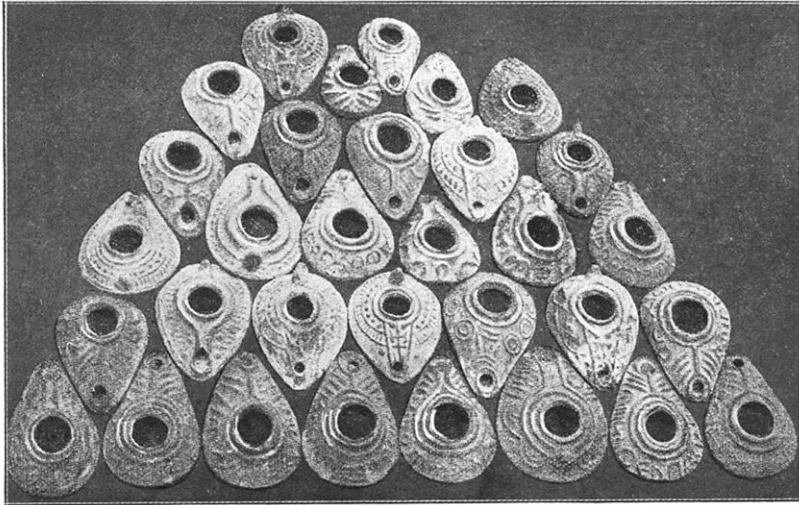


FIG. 1

not read, and only lately, with the larger accumulation of examples, has decipherment been attempted. Even now all is not plain, and a brief study of typical specimens may be of interest.

A group of the lamps with and without inscriptions will show that they are of nearly uniform size and give room for a circular ornamentation (Fig. 1). From lamps obtained in the excavation at Gezer it is seen that the modern form of a slightly curved edge, admitting no ornamentation, has indeed existed since pre-Israelite times.¹ The use in tombs of the

¹ *Quarterly Statement*, October, 1904, p. 327.

cup-like lamps having a circle of letters or other marks seems to have reached its height in early Christian times, when two hundred or more were sometimes placed in a single tomb.²

In his *Excavations at Jerusalem 1894-7* Dr. F. J. Bliss found and reported many specimens, with only partial readings³ (Fig. 2-4). Mr. Macalister has recently spoken of the fact that one inscription seems to



FIG. 2



FIG. 3



FIG. 4

have prevailed on the Christian lamps, ΦΥC ΧΥ ΦΕΝ ΠΑCΙΝ, but that this is sometimes incorrectly put on, causing puzzling combinations of letters (Fig. 5).⁴ From a lamp on which this inscription is correctly placed,



FIG. 5

though it is not good Greek, the elements may be seen as they are found on other lamps. Thus when Dr. Bliss speaks of one inscription as made of two letters, and when Mr. G. Robinson Lees gives ten such inscriptions,⁵ it is evident that the letters are from this source (Fig. 4). M. Clermont-Ganneau had previously pointed out that a rather common inscription, not distinctly Christian, is ΛΥΧΝΑΡΙΑ ΚΑΛΑ,⁶ "pretty lamps" (Fig. 2). A very difficult inscription seems to give parts of the word ΛΟΥΧΝΟC, "lamp," twice (Fig. 3).

In the account of his work at Gezer printed in the October, 1904, *Statement* Mr. Macalister gives with his decipher-

² *Ibid.*, p. 326.

³ Plate XXVI, p. 111.

⁴ *Quarterly Statement*, January, 1904, p. 24; October, 1904, p. 349.

⁵ *Ibid.*, January, 1892, p. 40.

⁶ *Recueil d'archéologie orientale*, 1888, Vol. I, p. 171; *Quarterly Statement*, July, 1896, p. 259.

ment a Christian lamp found there, and shows how blunderingly the letters of ΦΩC XY ΦΕΝ ΠΑCΙΝ were put on (Fig. 6). It is possible that under persecution the sentence was disguised, but this has not been suggested in print. A similar use of the detached letters is seen on a lamp in the Harvard Semitic Museum numbered 2434 (Fig. 7).

An altogether different inscription is that found at Gezer and very clearly inscribed ΛΥΧ(N)ΟC CΤΕΦΑΝΟΥ ΦΙΛΟΧΡΙCΤ(Ο)Υ, "the lamp of Stephanos Philochristos," as Macalister reads it, supposing the name to

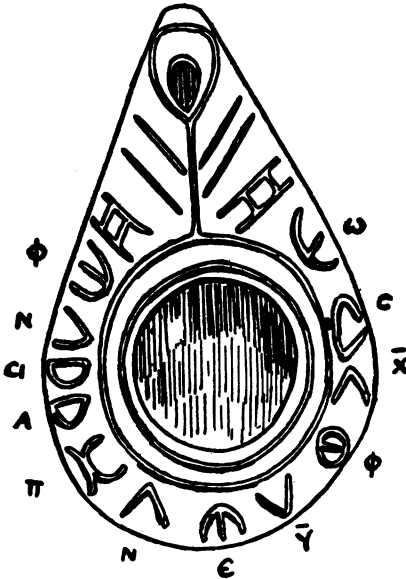


FIG. 6

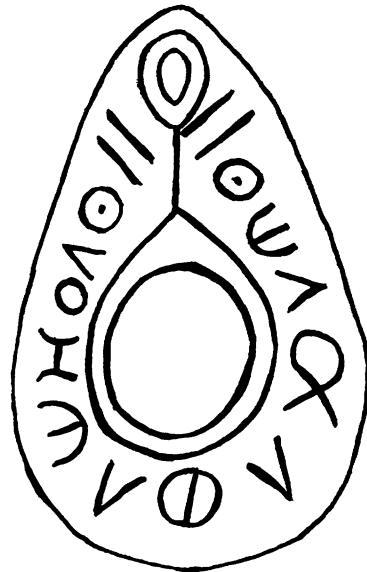


FIG. 7

be that of the owner of the tomb (Fig. 8). It seems hardly probable that a man would have the lamp made and thus marked for himself, and it seems more likely that it was made to honor the memory of the first martyr, or of some other Christian by that name. Indeed, it might be read without difficulty "the lamp of Christ-loving victory." This case of a unique specimen is nothing new in Palestine archæology, and we have learned to hold such explanations as may be offered in abeyance until, as has often occurred, similar specimens are found.

In the *Revue biblique*? M. Clermont-Ganneau has figured a lamp which combines the usual legend with the word ΚΑΛΗ (*sic*), so that the meaning is, "The light of Christ shines beautiful for all" (Fig. 9). He names

⁷ October, 1898, p. 485.

another specimen having the same words, and concludes that the lamps bearing only $\Lambda\Upsilon\chi\text{N}\alpha\text{P}\iota\alpha\ \text{K}\alpha\lambda\alpha$ are also Christian. He refers them all to the usage of the Greek church at Jerusalem called the "Holy Fire," and believes that these lamps were lighted then, as candles are lighted still, from the fire in the hands of the priest. This may seem a far-fetched derivation until we note his statement that these very words, $\Phi\omega\text{C}\ \chi\text{Y}\ \Phi\alpha\iota\text{N}\epsilon\iota\ \tau\tau\alpha\text{C}\text{I}\text{N}$ are found in the liturgy of St. Basil used at the feast in

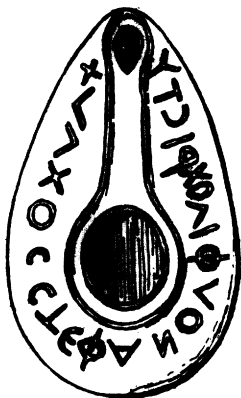


FIG. 8

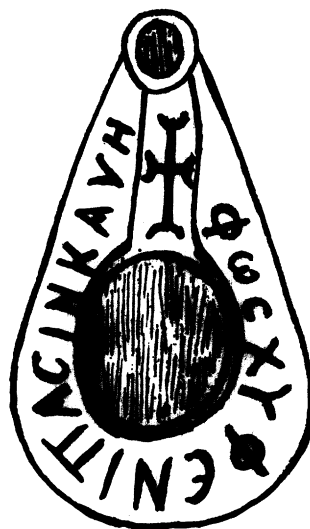


FIG. 9

Jerusalem on Holy Saturday, when the fire ceremonies take place. Of course the words are derived from John's gospel, 1:5, 9, and John's first epistle, 2:8.

Mr. Macalister has also found a lamp with the inscription $\text{KC}\ \Phi\omega\text{TICMOC}\ \text{MOY}$,⁸ but has not figured it. These words are the Septuagint version of Ps. 27:1, "The Lord is my light."

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A CHRISTIAN LAMP FROM DENDERAH

Among the accessions to the Haskell Oriental Museum from Professor Petrie's excavations at Denderah in 1897-98, is a Roman lamp, probably of the Byzantine period (300-700 A. D.), with a Greek inscription. The

⁸ *Quarterly Statement*, October, 1904, p. 349.